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Defeating Evil from Within: Comparative Perspectives on "Redemption through Sin"

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Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst
Das Rettende auch.
Hölderlin, "Patmos"

The greatest scholarship requires the closest study. We all know that Gershom Scholem's classic essay "Redemption through Sin" (written 1935, published 1937) remains one of the most influential essays written not only in Jewish Studies but in the history of religions more generally.[1] It was a tour de force, serving at once as programmatic seed, historiographic manifesto, research agenda, and transvaluational breakthrough. Even after many translations and republications, this essay remains positioned in Scholem's corpus as a vital synthesis of his innovative creativity. But the paradoxical morality articulated by Scholem in "Redemption through Sin" only appears to be utterly novel. In fact, it emerges more and more clearly that his genius, as manifested in this essay, may properly be understood as rooted in its own era.

I would like to show that "Redemption through Sin" can be illuminated when read in the light of contemporaneous currents in

[1] The publishing and translation history of this essay are now provided in the new edition of the German version (which has appeared as *Judaica V* of the Suhrkamp Scholem) edited and translated by Michael Brocke (Frankfurt am Main, 1992). In the present essay I cite Hillel Halkin's English translation printed in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays in Jewish Spirituality* (New York, 1971).

European intellectual life. I will concentrate here on "Redemption through Sin" in three intellectual contexts, leaving aside the familiar terrain of Jewish and German influences on Scholem. The contexts I examine are Paris of the 1930s, the burgeoning field of History of Religions, and the Eranos meetings. My precise focus will be Scholem's still-shocking assertion, made in "Redemption through Sin", that evil can be defeated from within.

Scholem as Historian of Religions

> Evil must be fought with evil. We are thus gradually led to a position which as the history of religion shows, occurs with a kind of tragic necessity in every great crisis of the religious mind. I am referring to the fatal yet at the same time deeply fascinating doctrine of the holiness of sin.[2]
> Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*

The consensus approach to Scholem's multi-faceted career has perhaps been epitomized by his erstwhile student Nathan Rotenstreich, who characterized Scholem as "a unique synthesis of a bibliographer, editor of texts, historian, historian of religions, and metaphysician."[3] My point is not to quarrel with this characterization, but rather to explore the one element in it which has rarely been discussed: Scholem as historian of religions as such. An immediate product of the period between the wars, the history of religions was epitomized, in the older generation, by Gerardus van der Leeuw and Rudolf Otto, and among the Young Turks, by scholars like Henry Corbin and Mircea Eliade. This history of religions was identifiable by a fiercely Nietzschean intensity, and by monographs bristling with extreme formulations, grandiose projects, and pyrotechnic displays of erudition.

Scholem considered himself such an historian of religion, using this self-designation in "Redemption through Sin" (89, 110), *Major*

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[2] *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* translated by George Lichtheim (New York, 1941), p. 315. Hereafter known as *Major Trends*.

[3] Rotenstreich, "Symbolism and Transcendence: On Some Philosophical Aspects of Gershom Scholem's Opus", *Review of Metaphysics* 31 (1977–78): 604–614, at 604.

Trends, and throughout the Eranos lectures. Eranos essays such as "Religious Authority and Mysticism" (1957), and the late "Nihilism as a Religious Phenomenon" (1974), were not framed as Jewish Studies, but explicitly as studies in the general history of religions.[4] At the end of his life he still stressed, in the final version of *Origins of Kabbalah*, that Kabbalah "can only be explained in terms of history of religions."[5]

To understand Scholem's conception of the history of religions, I start with his early attitude to the organization of knowledge more generally. In his early career, he was ambivalent, to say the least, concerning the new social sciences, sanguine if not unmoved by the apparent advances achieved by Durkheim, Freud, and Weber. Thus in his great 1930 essay on Rosenzweig he proclaimed: "The 19th century sciences demanded for themselves the right of the mysteries of creation – and the wretched experience of the 'disenchanted world', which they called *Erfahrung* (experience), set itself up as eternal."[6] In Paris 1927, Walter Benjamin was the first to whom he posed the question burning in him at that time: Was Judaism "still alive as a heritage or an experience, even as something constantly evolving, or did it exist only as an object of cognition?"[7] In other words, Scholem's stated desire for an integrated science –transcending, on the one hand, the wretched experience of the disenchanted world, and on the other, the study of Judaism as only an object of cognition – spurred his quest for a total, organic theory of religion.

Insofar as no existing theory of religion fit this bill, Scholem gravitated to the emerging history of religions as a sympathetic

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[4] On this point I disagree with Josef Dan, who suggests that Scholem was uninterested in the comparative study of religion. See his introduction to the English translation of Scholem's *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead* [1962], translated by Joachim Neugroschel (New York, 1991).

[5] Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, translated by Allen Arkush (Princeton, 1987) p. 11.

[6] Scholem, "Franz Rosenzweig and His Book *The Star of Redemption*," translated in The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig (ed.) Paul Mendes-Flohr (Brandeis University Press and the University Press of New England, Hanover and London, 1988) pp. 20–42, at p. 27.

[7] Scholem, *Walter Benjamin. The Story of a Friendship* translated by Harry Zohn (Philadelphia, 1981) p. 136.

intellectual vehicle. It is beyond my present purposes to trace Scholem's eventual entry into the Eranos circle of historians of religion, with their embrace of a celebrated phenomenology of religious symbols.[8] It suffices to note that Scholem's history of religions, like theirs, was essentially and explicitly a symbology. About the Kabbalists, he wrote that for them, "Judaism was more than anything else a corpus symbolicum..."[9] Scholem's first Eranos collection, it may be recalled, was *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*. There he wrote that "[Kabbalah responded to philosophy] in favor of a living God, who, like all living forces, speaks in symbols"[10] and defined a symbol as the "means of expressing an experience that is in itself expressionless".[11]

"A Radical Concept of Freedom"

"Since Bakunin, Europe has lacked a radical concept of freedom. The Surrealists have one."
Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism" [1929], p. 189

The "experience which is itself expressionless" was conceived by Scholem to be nothing less than the very motorforce of religious breakthroughs. As he put it resoundingly in the last sentence of "Religious Authority and Mysticism": "It is mystical experience which conceives and gives birth to authority."[12] Mystical experience, according to this theory, is initially if not essentially formless – indeed, the smelting and dissolution of religious forms. Descent into formlessness itself constitutes the very means by which the mystic can effectively reconfigure doctrines, institutions,

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[8] Scholem was already corresponding with his future Eranos colleagues in the 1930s. For example, he was already in correspondance with Henry Corbin in 1937: see the letter of Scholem reproduced in *Henry Corbin* (ed.) Christian Jambet (L'Herne, Paris: 1981) p. 332.

[9] Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, p. 34.

[10] *On Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, p. 89 (his italics). See also "Star of David", in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, p. 257.

[11] *On Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, p. 22.

[12] p. 31.

whole systems of myth. Scholem consistently called this creative condition of formlessness "inner freedom".

He played, moreover, two interesting variations on this romantic idea of polymorphous vision. First, he strongly emphasized its impact on society, that is, that it "gives birth to authority". In "Redemption through Sin", more particularly, he stressed that the appearance of the mystical messiah caused "this inner sense of freedom" to be experienced by thousands of Jews.[13] But, in addition to the collective exportation of "inner freedom", Scholem also stressed – and here is where he sounds like a typical historian of religions – that this same "inner freedom" is required for the historian of religions himself to understand mysticism. It is in this context that he announces in "Redemption through Sin", with regard to understanding the "powerful constructive impulses... [at work] beneath the surface of lawlessness, antinomianism and catastrophic negation... Jewish historians until now have not had the inner freedom to attempt the task."[14] Scholem felt that he had that inner freedom.

Decades later he confessed, "It was not until my fortieth year that I found the courage to speak out about topics which, at least for me, had held a strong attraction and fascination." Scholem turned 40 in 1937: the immediate articulation of this "attraction and fascination" was, of course, "Redemption through Sin", written shortly before his 40th birthday, and *Major Trends*, written just after it.[15] The "topics... that held a strong attraction and fascination" were those of radical antinomianism. In *Major Trends* he speaks of the "deeply fascinating doctrine of the holiness of sin" while in *On The Kabbalah and its Symbolism* he confesses that "[o]ne cannot but help be fascinated by the unbelievable freedom... from

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[13] p. 87.

[14] p. 84 (emphasis added). Compare this with Benjamin, "Surrealism", "This is the moment to embark on a work ... " (184).

[15] One wonders to what extent this "attraction and *fascination*" pertained to Jacob Frank, whom Scholem called "the most hideous and *uncanny* figure in the whole history of Jewish Messianism". (*Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 308). Scholem retrospectively claimed Frankism as anticipatory of Stalinism ("Irving Howe Interviews Gershom Scholem: 'The Only Thing in My Life I Have Never Doubted Is the Existence of God'," pp. 53–57, at p. 56, in *Present Tense*).

which their own world seemed to construct itself."[16] As he noted in *Walter Benjamin. The story of a friendship*, "it was the question I grappled with, under varying emphases, for years."[17]

Marking these themes of symbology and formlessness, inner freedom and antinomianism, we are prepared to enter Paris of the 1930s.

"A Sort of Moral Conspiracy": Sade, Frank and the French Revolution

"The transgression does not deny the taboo but transcends and completes it." George Bataille[18]

The Berlin-born Jerusalemite historian of Kabbalah might seem to have had slight associations with the City of Lights.[19] In fact, the Paris directly apposite to Scholem's antinomianism was a cauldron of European cultural ferment between the wars. Walter Benjamin, Pierre Klossowski, Georges Bataille, Roger Caillois, Denis de

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[16] *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 315; *On Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, translated by Ralph Manheim (New York, 1965) p. 13.

[17] P. 136. Indeed, in the very final pages of the final version of *Origins of Kabbalah*, speaking of antinomianism in *Sefer Temuna*, one sees the theme replayed: "One is amazed at the degree of freedom with which Kabbalistic speculation attempted to combine its conception of the deity with a new understanding of the world, not only as a natural or cosmic entity, but also a historical one." (p. 474).

[18] Bataille, *Death and Sensuality, A Study of Eroticism and the Taboo* (New York, 1962): 57. About this statement, Mehlman asks "... does not the Sabbatian precept ["a commandment to be fulfilled by a transgression", *mizva ha-ba'ah be-averah*] appear to anticipate what is perhaps the central affirmation of Bataille's *L'Erotisme* [=*Death and Sensuality*]?" (*Walter Benjamin for Children, An Essay on his Radio Years* (University of Chicago Press, 1993) p. 66.

[19] His contact with its intellectuals, and his impact on them, was surprisingly wide. This is equally true, perhaps, of historians of religion, but also of non-Jewish radical thinkers like Foucault and Bourdieu, and of other French thinkers. And this remains equally true of younger French-Jewish intellectuals, from Maurice Kriegel to Christine Buci-Glucksman, Henri Atlan, and Maurice Hayoun. French translations of Scholem's major works have long preceded English translations.

Rougemont, Henry Corbin (Heidegger's first French translator, and a correspondent with Scholem in the 1930s) are some of the thinkers whose Paris of the 1930s frames "Redemption through Sin" in a properly comparative context. It was in this Paris in 1927 that Scholem revealed his breakthrough, "a very surprising discovery – that is, a messianic antinomianism that had developed within Judaism in strictly Jewish concepts."[20] Scholem saw Benjamin only once more, for five days in Paris, in 1938.

I want to suggest that in the context of this radical Parisian scene, Scholem's "Redemption through Sin" appears familiarly bold, and not some sui generis outrage. For that Paris scene was one of regular transgressions, a time for normal enormities. Already, before World War I, the poet Guillaume Apollinaire had announced that the Marquis de Sade was "the freest spirit who ever lived".[21] Starting in the 1930s, French philosophers Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Blanchot, Jean Paulhan, Pierre Klossowski, and George Bataille celebrated the sovereign transgressor, the Marquis de Sade, as a model of perfect freedom. It was precisely at the same time, and with precisely this liberatory idiom, that Scholem treated Sade's contemporary, Jacob Frank, in "Redemption through Sin".

The Parisian artist and philosopher Pierre Klossowski, for example, linked de Sade to the Revolution in his 1939 lecture, "The Marquis de Sade and the French Revolution." This talk was delivered to the Parisian College of Sociology sporadically attended by his friend Walter Benjamin.[22] Klossowski was subsequently to enjoy a strong relationship with the work of Henry Corbin and Mircea Eliade, key figures and longtime associates of Scholem's at the Eranos Tagungen.[23] In "Redemption through Sin", Scholem

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[20] "Redemption through Sin", p. 136.

[21] Apollinaire is cited in *The Marquis de Sade. The Complete Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom and other Writings*, compiled and translated by Richard Seaver and Austryn Wainhouse (Grove Press, New York, 1965) p. xiii.

[22] Klossowski, "The Marquis de Sade and the Revolution", Tuesday, February 7, 1939: *The College of Sociology*.

[23] See for example the letter of Klossowski to Eliade dated June 7, 1952: *Mircea Eliade* (ed.) C. Tacou (Cahiers l'Herne, Paris, 1978) p. 284. For his admiration for the work of Corbin, see Jeffrey Mehlman, "Literature and Hospitality: Klossowski's Hamann", *Studies in Romanticism* 22 (1983) 329–347,

likewise links Frank directly to the French Revolution – he even published a book at his life's end with the title *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*.[24] In short Scholem linked the libertine Frank to the eventual Revolution, just as Klossowski linked the libertine de Sade to the Revolution. Furthermore, as we will see, both did so explicitly in terms of a gnostic politics.[25]

Here is Klossowski's summary of the Sadian imperative: "The evil must, therefore, erupt once and for all; the bad seed has to flourish so the mind can tear it out and consume it. In a word, evil must be made to prevail once and for all in the world so that it will destroy itself and so Sade's mind can find peace."[26] Klossowski stresses here that "the evil must erupt once and for all". Analogously, for Scholem, the Sabbatian movement needed the repellent Frank: "... in all his actions a truly corrupt and degenerate individual. Indeed, it might be plausibly argued that in

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at p. 333, for Klossowski's high praise of Corbin's translation of Hamann's *Aesthetica in Nuce*. This latter text also had a profound effect on Scholem.

[24] Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme* (Paris, Seuil, 1981 [Marc Bloch Lectures]). Jacob Taubes was one of the few to object to this argument: "The death of a Frankist adventurer at the guillotine of the French Revolution does not secure a link between Sabbatian Messianism and the *Aufklärung*." (Jacob Taubes, "Scholem's theses on Messianism reconsidered", *Social Science Information* 21 4/5 (1982): 665–675, at 672).

[25] The link from Klossowski to Scholem is not so far as one might imagine. Klossowski knew Benjamin in Paris, and translated his "L'Oeuvre d'art à l'époque de sa reproduction méchanisée", in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 5 (1936), edited by Horkheimer and Adorno. For a penetrating investigation of the links between Klossowski's reading of Benjamin and his antinomian Sadism, see Mehlman (cited above in n. 23). And of course Horkheimer and Adorno famously linked de Sade to the Enlightenment in "Excursus II. *Juliette* or Enlightenment and Morality", *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Continuum, New York, 1972) pp. 81–120.

[26] "The conjecture is that underlying the Revolution, there was a sort of moral conspiracy whose aim would have been to compel a humanity that was at loose ends, having lost its sense of social necessity, to become aware of its guilt. And this conspiracy was well served by two methods: an exoteric method practiced by Joseph de Maistre in his sociology of original sin and an infinitely complex, esoteric method that *consists in disguising itself as atheism in order to combat atheism, in speaking the language of moral skepticism in order to combat moral skepticism, with the sole aim of giving back to reason everything this method can, in order to show its worthlessness.*": Klossowski, "The Marquis de Sade and the Revolution", *The College of Sociology*, p. 222, and p. 230 [delivered Tuesday, February 7, 1939: emphasis in the original].

order completely to exhaust its seemingly endless potential for the contradictory and the unexpected the Sabbatian movement was in need of just such a strongman..."[27]

Just as Satan is said to be the most gripping character depicted in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, so too is Jacob Frank the truly vivid antihero of "Redemption through Sin", if not of Scholem's entire corpus.[28] Outrageous, lascivious, and cruel, but also fascinating and influential, Scholem's Frank furthermore follows the path of Klossowski's Sade, and stirs the French Revolution.[29] In "Redemption through Sin" Scholem starkly frames the teleological trajectory of Sabbatianism in terms of the Revolution, that is, that it was specifically the French Revolution which made Frank's revolt historically significant.[30] "Seemingly, the [French] Revolution had

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[27] "Redemption through Sin", p. 126–127.

[28] Thus, in his essay on "Religious Authority and Mysticism", Scholem describes the antinomian character of Frank's heresy as deriving from "man's contact with the primal source of life": "Utterly free, fettered by no law or authority, this 'Life' never ceases to produce forms and to destroy what it has produced. It is the anarchic promiscuity of all living things. Into this bubbling cauldron, this continuum of destruction, the mystic plunges. For Frank, anarchic destruction represented all the Luciferian radiance, all the positive tones and overtones, of the word 'Life'." (*On Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, p. 28). Note also that the historian of religions R.J. Zwi Werblowsky served as the eventual translator of Scholem's monumental *Sabbetai Zevi the Mystical Messiah* (Princeton, 1973, itself underwritten and published by the Jungian Bollingen Foundation, as was some of Scholem's research for the original work). Werblowsky's first book, *Lucifer and Prometheus*, (London, 1952) bore an introduction by Jung. This appeared at a time when Werblowsky was a Jungian student in Switzerland, and when he was also counseling Jung on the study of Kabbalah. Werblowsky originally opposed Scholem's theory of Shabbetai Zvi, but then changed his mind and translated this masterpiece into English. Of particular relevance here is the Satanic element, also much emphasized in Jung's gnostic assault on the God of the Hebrew Bible, *Answer to Job*. (*Antwort auf Hiob*, Zurich, 1952. First translated into English in London, 1954) I hope to return to the controversy (between Scholem, Corbin, Eliade, Buber, and Jung) on *Answer to Job* at another occasion.

[29] It appears as the last sentence of the first paragraph of "The Messianic Idea in Kabbalism" (*The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, p. 37); the last sentence of the last paragraph of "The Crisis of Tradition" (*The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, p. 77); and throughout "Redemption through Sin". Finally, as already noted above, at the end of his life he wrote *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme* (see n. 24 above).

[30] "Prior to the French Revolution the historical conditions were lacking which might have caused this upheaval to break forth in the form of an open struggle for social change... but it would be mistaken to conclude from this

come to corroborate the fact that the nihilist outlook had been correct all along: now the pillars of the world were indeed being shaken, and all the old ways seemed about to be overturned."[31]

In fact the shaking of the foundations continued apace. After the Revolution came the Utopian theorist of nineteenth century Paris, Charles Fourier. In Paris of the 1930s, Pierre Klossowski and Walter Benjamin rediscovered Fourier. Klossowski claimed that the Marquis de Sade adumbrated "Fourier's... harmonist society based on the free play of passions."[32] And Benjamin, who saw Klossowski with some regularity in Paris between 1935 and 1939, evoked Kabbalah in connection with Fourier, speaking of the "meshing of passions, the intricate interaction of the *passions mèchanistes* with the *passion cabaliste*..."[33] One can hardly help, then, but recall Scholem's contemporaneous characterization of Frank's antinomianism: "It is the anarchic promiscuity of all living things."

The Recrudescence of Gnosis

In addition to associations with the French Revolution and the subsequent Fourieristic "free play of passions", Scholem and Klossowski liken Sade and Frank to ancient gnostics. In fact, they [simultaneously] claimed to have discovered nothing less

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that Sabbatianism did not permanently affect the outward course of Jewish history... beneath the surface of lawlessness, antinomianism, and catastrophic negation, powerful constructive impulses were at work, and these, I maintain, it is the duty of the historian to uncover." ("Redemption through Sin", p. 84).

[31] "Redemption through Sin", p. 137.

[32] *College of Sociology*, p. 228. See also p. 418, n. 14, for his other writings on Fourier. And when Klossowski, years later, wrote a brief memoir on Benjamin, titled "Between Marx and Fourier", he again evoked Benjamin's championing of the Fourier's phalansterian "free play of passions". See *On Walter Benjamin. Critical Essays and Recollections* edited by Gary Smith, (MIT Press, Cambridge Mass., and London, 1988, reprint 1991) p. 368.

[33] Benjamin, "Fourier, or the Arcades", in "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century" *Reflections*, translated by Edmund Jephcott (New York, 1978) p. 148. Note also that Benjamin saw Baudelaire's attempted recupertaion of *Erfahrung* as mediated through Fourier: Benjamin, *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn (New York, 1968), "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire", p. 183.

momentous than a spontaneous rebirth of gnosis in eighteenth century Europe. This is Klossowski on de Sade: "In the soul of this libertine great lord of the century of the Enlightenment, very old mental structures are reawakened; it is impossible not to recognize the whole ancient system of the Manichaean gnosis, the visions of Basilides, Valentinus, and especially Marcion."[34] And this is Scholem on Frank: "Indeed, to anyone familiar with the history of religion it might seem far more likely that he was dealing here with an antinomian myth from the second century composed by such nihilistic Gnostics as Carpocrates and his followers than that all this was actually taught and believed by Polish Jews living on the eve of the French Revolution..."[35]

In a recent work that sheds light on the recent discussion, Jeffery Mehlman astutely observes that "in the construing of Sabbatianism as the historically repressed past of rationalism, Scholem's thought converges with Benjamin's."[36] I would add that Klossowski coincides with Scholem and Benjamin in identifying a sudden reeruption of the gnostic repressed. They each argued, variously, that a sudden recrudescence of gnosis uncovered antinomian norms long repressed in history.

Festival and Inversion

La fête est le chaos retrouvé et façonné à nouveau.[37]

Scholem claimed that Frank taught a "religious myth of nihilism", a "mythology of nihilism", while Klossowski argued that de Sade

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[34] Klossowski, *Sade My Neighbor*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, Illinois, 1991) p. 100.

[35] "Redemption through Sin", pp. 132–133.

[36] Mehlman, *Walter Benjamin for Children, An Essay on his Radio Years* (University of Chicago Press, 1993) p. 42 (emphasis added). See the critical passages on "historical psychology" in *On Kabbalah and its Symbolism* (comprised exclusively of lectures delivered at Eranos), especially pp. 2, 3, 33, 106, and 204.

[37] Caillois, *L'Homme et le sacré* (Paris, 1939) cited by van der Leeuw (see n. 47 below). Caillois's notion of festival, thus, was cited prominently by Scholem, van der Leeuw, Eliade, and Adorno/Horkheimer.

inaugurated a "utopia of evil".[38] The question that next presents itself is the following. How were such extreme counter-modernist claims reinscribed into successful histories of religion? One answer is that they operated by inversion. In Paris of the 1930s, a post-Durkheimian sociology, largely flourishing outside the groves of the academy, came to emphasize a sacred sociology, also termed the sacred of the Left Hand.[39] Its primary venue was the short-lived College of Sociology, where Klossowski spoke on the Marquis de Sade, and where Benjamin showed up from time to time.

In this alternative sociology of religion, conventional valences were inverted more or less systematically. Perhaps its key contribution to social theory is found in the concept of transgression, best known in the now-famous formulation of George Bataille. One motif in the study of religion that came to prominence in this sacred sociology was its transgressive reading of festival. Roger Caillois, cofounder with Bataille of the College of Sociology, author of *Man and the Sacred*, and, eventually, publisher of Scholem on several occasions, epitomized the Left Hand sacred sociology in his influential "theory of celebrations": "This interval of universal confusion

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[38] *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 316 and 420, n. 61; *Sade My Neighbor*, p. 62. Klossowski bemoans a permanent hiatus of interdictions much like that conjured by the censorious Philip Rieff: "On various sides, presently in the endless struggle for power, are two apparently opposing cadres: (1) rationalizers of technological reason; (2) orgiasts of revolutionary sensuality; these cadres converge in the cult of violence. By 'cult of violence' I mean that openness to possibility in which nothing remains true; in this original of cults, all oppositions are welcomed as if life could be an endless experience of political, technological or interpretative breakthroughs, against orders recognized only for purposes of disestablishment." *Fellow Teachers* (Harper & Row: New York, etc., 1973) pp. 20–21.

[39] See Michael Richardson, "Sociology on the Razor's Edge: Configurations of the Sacred at the College of Sociology", *Theory, Culture and Society* 9 (1992), 27–44, at 35. While Richardson would seem to suggest that this "sacred of the Left Hand", sacred of transgression, was somehow meant to counteract Fascism, it may be noted that the Fascist theorist of religion, Julius Evola, mentor and friend to Eliade for fifty years, used the "Way of the Left Hand" to refer to his own brand of fascist spirituality. See, for example, *Explorations. Hommes et Problèmes* (Pardès, Puiseaux, 1989), especially the essays "Sur la 'Voie de la main gauche'," (pp. 141–146), and "Dionysos et la 'voie de la main gauche'," (pp. 97–104). For Evola's relation to Eliade's theory of religion, see my "The Lives of Baron Evola", *Alphabet City* 4/5 (1996) pp. 84–90.

represented by the festival masquerades as the moment in which the whole world is abrogated. Therefore all excesses are allowed during it. Your behavior must be contrary to the rule. Everything should be back to front... in this way all those laws which protect the good natural and social order are systematically violated."[40]

Shortly after the war, Denis de Rougemont, another leader of the College of Sociology, wrote *The Devil's Share*. This work was personally funded by Mary Mellon, patron of the the Eranos group and the Bollingen Foundation, which was soon to fund Scholem's writing of *Sabbetai Zevi the Mystical Messiah*.[41] In *The Devil's Share*, De Rougemont reiterated this transgressive view of festival. "[T]he overturning of the moral laws (thou shalt kill, thou shalt steal, thou shalt bear false witness, with honor); the suspension of law; limitless expenditures; human sacrifices; disguises; processions; unleashing of collective passions; temporary disqualification of individual conflicts. I speak of a state of exception as one might say a state of siege or state of grace."[42]

Festival was thus conceived as the ultimate ritual, carnival as eschaton. On this generalization, ritual as regulative practice was inverted into myth as the collapse of normative practice. By this

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[40] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (citing Caillois from *NRF* Jan. 1940) p. 105. The Critical Theorists, in this instance, seem not to have recognized the reactionary implications of festival. See Umberto Eco, "The frames of comic 'freedom'," in *Carnival!* edited by Thomas Sebeok, (Mouton: Berlin, NYC, Amsterdam, 1984) 1–9, at p. 6: "Carnival can exist only as an *authorized* transgression (which in fact represents a blatant case of *contradictio in adjecto* or of happy *double binding* – capable of curing instead of producing neuroses). If the ancient, religious carnival was limited in time, the modern mass-carnival is limited in space: it is reserved for certain places, certain streets, or framed by the television screen. In this sense, comedy and carnival are not instances of real transgressions: on the contrary, they represent paramount examples of law reinforcement. They remind us of the existence of the law." And see "The semiotic theory of carnival as the inversion of bipolar opposites", by V.V. Ivanov, in the same volume, pp. 11–34.

[41] Details can be found in William McGuire's official retrospective of Eranos and the Bollingen Foundation, *Bollingen. An Adventure in Collecting the Past* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1982). Hereafter, this is referred to as *Bollingen*.

[42] Denis de Rougemont, *The Devil's Share*, (New York, 1944) p. 77. Announced in the first catalogue of the Bollingen Series, that of 1944: for his centrality to Mary Mellon and the origins of Bollingen, see *Bollingen*, 76–78.

inversion, antinomian historians of religions could alchemically transmute dead ritual into living myth. Beyond the fleeting moment of festival, the very ideal human type in philosophical anthropology, according to this sacred sociology, likewise was inverted. Thus the holy man became the holy sinner; the public leader became the secret saint; the rational morality of monotheism became the transrational amorality of mysticism; and the heretic became exemplar.[43] *Nomos* was now perfectly inverted into antinomianism.

Eranos: Beholding the Kingdom of Eternity Through the Ruins

To live outside the law you must be honest.
Bob Dylan, *Blonde on Blonde*, 1966

Denis de Rougemont, another thinker who linked prewar Paris and postwar Ascona, once evoked the Eranos ideal with the slogan, "Heretics of the World Unite!"[44] However committed to a collective, Zionist struggle, Scholem remained an independent if not heretical historian of religion.[45] And so, when he set to stating certain general reflections on religion, he did so through the most undogmatic and anticatechetical venue imaginable. He chose the

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[43] On the hidden saint, see "The Thirty-Six Just Men", in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*.

[44] de Rougemont, in *Mélanges offerts à Henry Corbin*. (Teheran and Montreal, 1977) pp. 539–547. Emil Cioran, with Eliade in mind, drew the following conclusion: "We are all of us, and Eliade in the fore, *would-have-been* believers; we are all religious minds without religion." "Beginnings of a Friendship", "in *Myths and Symbols*, *Studies in Honor of Mircea Eliade*, edited by Charles Long and Joseph Kitagawa (Chicago, 1969) pp. 413–414. Similarly, Scholem said of himself that "my secularism is not secular". *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis*, translated by Werner Dannhauser, New York, 1976) p. 46. In short, the cultural Sabbatianism under discussion may more generally be seen as a shared strategy to "save" tradition in a post-traditional age, *by any means necessary*, so to speak.

[45] McGuire accurately characterizes Scholem as "the most independent-spirited of the Eranos regulars" (*Bollingen*, p. 152).

Eranos meetings, held every August since 1933 in Ascona, Switzerland.

It should be repeated that Eranos convoked historians of religions, and that Scholem understood himself to be an historian of religions. This particular enterprise, like the College of Sociology, tended to transmute ritual into myth. Insofar as Eranos fully removed itself from social reality, it operated by intentional contrast as a paradise of texts, as a veritable world-navel of spiritual hermeneutics. For its historians of religion, details (so precious to Scholem) pertained to tiny textual units rather than to the smithereen increments of real ritual practice. By escaping present society to leap into textual boundlessness, they found themselves at the end of history, freed from history's bonds.[46]

Gerardus Van der Leeuw, first president of the International Association for the History of Religions, at the first Eranos meeting that Scholem attended, spoke of "eschatology, the myth of the impossible". Scholem later cited this essay.[47] Georges Bataille, friend of Benjamin and Eliade, provides the link here, inasmuch as his transgressive philosophy rested on just such a myth of the impossible: a vertiginous impossible, the subsuming of possibles, the

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[46] There was both an elective affinity and a genetic filiation between the Eranos group and the figures discussed by Lutz Niethammer in his *Posthistoire. Has History Come to an End?* translated by Patrick Camiller (Verso, London and New York, 1992). Figures studied by Niethammer associated with those of the Eranos group include Arnold Gehlen, who strongly influenced Adolf Portmann, a leader at Eranos. Walter Benjamin overlapped both groups, and Martin Heidegger influenced both to a substantial extent. A key figure in the *Posthistoire* discussion is Ernst Jünger, who edited the journal *Antaios* with Eliade. Apposite to the present inquiry, Jünger once asserted the following, in justifying the use of drugs on the part of a certain élite: "But to dabble in drugs you need to be intelligent, if you do not master them, they will dominate you, and destroy you" (as cited in Nigel Jones, "The Writer as Warrior. An Encounter with Ernst Jünger", *London Magazine* 23/4 (1983) 62–68, at 67). Here again "forbidden" activities are permitted, but only to "the few".

[47] Van der Leeuw, "Primordial Time and Final Time", *Man and Time, Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks* edited by Joseph Campbell (New York, 1957) p. 327. Delivered at the 1949 Eranos meeting, the occasion on which Scholem and Corbin made their first appearances at Eranos, also the occasion when Scholem delivered his programmatic paper, "Kabbalah and Myth". In the eventual English version of the latter essay, Scholem concluded by citing this paper of van der Leeuw (*On Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, p. 117).

"reconciling of what seems impossible to reconcile, respect for the law and violation of the law, the taboo and its transgression."[48] Just such a myth of the impossible, the eschatological overcoming of oppositions, became the foundational myth of Eranos.

Perhaps the most eloquent characterization of this dizzying Eranos ideal came from Father Hugo Rahner, a repeat participant:

> What is here contained is a gift to that living round-table [Eranos], made up of men who believe that our Western civilization has broken down only in order that it may be born anew, to the Eranos of those who dimly perceive the truth, as did Plato in his immortal seventh letter, and can behold the kingdom of eternity through the ruins. These are the men who know the comforting law of the spirit, that the demon in man is only permitted to tear down so that the angel in man with faltering hand may trace out the sources of new life.[49]

Father Rahner's dualism here poeticially drives home the familiar imperative of defeating evil from within. This antinomianism, which also may be called cultural Sabbatianism, underwrote the transgressive sacred sociology of preWar Paris just as it did the history of religions as practiced at Eranos, so fabulously successful throughout the Cold War period.[50]

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[48] Bataille, *Death and Sensuality, A Study of Eroticism and the Taboo* (New York, 1962) 30–31. Later in the same work Bataille clarifies this theory of religion: "... in the Christian system what I call transgression is called sin ... Take first the death on the Cross: it is a sacrifice, a sacrifice whose victim is God himself, But although the sacrifice redeems us, although the Church sings its paradoxical Felix Culpa! happy error – to the underlying fault, that which redeems us is also that which ought not to have taken place" (259).

[49] Hugo Rahner, 'Preface', *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery* (ET Harper & Row: New York and Evanston, 1963; orig. Rhein-Verlag, 1957) p. xiii [emphasis added].

[50] To take another example of the widely diffused acceptance of this motif at Eranos, consider the work of Henry Corbin, another close colleague of Scholem's, whose lifework bears certain deep similarities with Scholem, and who is generally considered the very spirit of Eranos: "Science the liberator has created an instrument of death. But it is my conviction that this despair conceals within itself the redemption of the West. 'Only the weapon that made it will ever cure the wound' says Parzifal in Wagner's drama." *The Concept of Comparative Philosophy*, translated by Peter Russell (Golgonooza Press, Ipswich, 1981), p. 28–29. Compare this redemptive despair with a remark Adorno borrowed from C.D. Grabbe: "For nothing but despair can save us (*Denn nichts als nur Verzweiflung kann uns retten*)", cited by Martin Jay in *Adorno* (Harvard University Press, 1984) p. 82.

Conclusion: Contextualizing the Sabbatian Paradox

Benjamin was the first person I told about a very surprising discovery I had made: Sabbatian theology – that is, a messianic antinomianism that had developed within Judaism in strictly Jewish concepts.
Gershom Scholem, "Paris (1927)" [51]

The greatest scholars require the closest study. Especially in the case of Gershom Scholem and his remarkable cohort, this shared cultural Sabbatianism demands protracted study because it rests on a "seemingly inexhaustible" paradox: redemption through sin. For Scholem and his colleagues, to be sure, such paradoxes were not examples of ultimate contradiction, or blatant violations of logic. Along with Mircea Eliade, Henry Corbin, Carl Jung, and other Eranos luminaries, Scholem subsumed the apparent contradiction of mere paradox into the higher continuities of *coincidentia oppositorum*, the coincidence of opposites, a doctrine they all employed.[52] For Scholem himself, the rational paradoxically reopens a transcendent access to the transrational, just as historicism returns the historian of mysticism to the untrammeled freedom at the end of history. In transtemporal terms, his dialectic ascends, like a ladder undercutting itself at every rung attained, from the pit of history all the way into that blue messianic heaven where laws of logic, historical laws, moral laws, are transvalued and made anew.

For all its celestial overtones of timelessness, however, Scholem's earthly accomplishment in "Redemption through Sin" was to make this Hebrew essay so deeply a part of its concretely historical interwar moment. By investing the young field of Jewish Studies with the even younger history of religions, he represented his day just as he successfully portrayed "tradition" in modernist monographs.

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[51] Scholem, *Walter Benjamin*. (cited in n. 7 above) p. 136.

[52] The *coincidentia oppositorum* may have been the leading *leitmoif* of Eranos. See for example Joseph Campbell's remarks that "... even a passing glance at the names of the scholars contributing [at Eranos] will suffice to make Jung's great point, that 'dividing walls are transparent', and where insight rules beyond differences, all the pairs-of-opposites come together". (*The Portable Jung*, New York, 1971), Editor's Introduction, p. xxx.

It should be emphasized that these religious studies were certainly not the only avenues of cultural Sabbatianism. Precisely the imperative to defeat evil from within was articulated by the political theologian and Kronjurist of the Third Reich, Carl Schmitt. It has been reported that, at his denazification hearing, he proudly confessed that he had intentionally immunized himself against Nazi infection: "I have drunk the Nazi bacillus, but it did not infect me!"[53] Similarly, the Italian Fascist and friend of Eliade, Julius Evola, claimed that we live in the last age, the epoch of the "expiration of traditional spiritual forms." Consequently a true élite is obliged to wrestle the evil of this dark age, an imperative he called "riding the tiger".[54] Finally, the philosopher Theodor

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[53] This is on the authority of the Catholic theologian Josef Pieper: "Before the Russian commission he maintained that this allegedly Nazi past would have to be understood after the pattern of von Pettenkofer's experiment. The examining officer, although apparently an educated man, naturally had no idea what he was talking about. Around the beginning of the century Max von Pettenkofer, a German scientist, put forward the thesis that infectious diseases were not caused by the bacillus alone; what was decisive was the human being's susceptibility to disease. To prove this thesis, he drank a glass of water containing a whole culture of the cholera bacillus – and, indeed, remained in good health. Carl Schmitt's conclusion was this: 'You see, I did the same thing. I have drunk the Nazi bacillus, but it did not infect me!' – which, of course, if it were true, would really and truly have made his conduct inexcusable." (Josef Pieper, *No One Could Have Known. An Autobiography: The Early Years 1904–1945* (ET Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 1987; orig. 1979) p. 176). In correspondence with Schmitt, Benjamin acknowledged the jurist's influence on him. See now the literature discussed in Lutz P. Koepnick, "The Spectacle, the *Trauerspiel*, and the Politics of Resolution: Benjamin Reading the Baroque Reading Weimar", *Critical Inquiry* 22 (1996) pp. 268–291, especially pp. 280–286.

[54] "The actual problem of our age is to find the method to carry [the values belonging to Tantrism] into effect. This method, justly compared to the the 'riding on the back of a tiger', may be summed up in this principle: 'In order to obtain freedom one must employ those same forces which have led to the downfall." Evola, "What Tantrism Means to Modern Western Civilization", *East and West* [Rome] 1/1 (1950) 28–32, at 29. Similarly: "Tantrism has foretold the phase of the last age (Kali Yuga), whose essential traits – those of an epoch of dissolution – can incontrovertibly be recognized in so many events and trends of our day and age. With this in mind, Tantrism has sanctioned the expiration of traditional spiritual forms that in previous epochs presupposed a different existential situation and a different human type. Tantrism also sought out new forms and new paths that might prove efficacious even in the 'dark age' and it tried to implement the realization of the same ideal of other epochs, namely, the

Adorno delivered this dictum at the end of his life: "Only that which inexorably denies tradition may once again retrieve it."[55] In short, Scholem's antinomian necessity "to defeat evil from within" enjoyed a certain elective affinity not only with the College of Sociology, Eranos, and the history of religions, but with a scattered élite of postreligious intellectuals.

Because Scholem's own "inner logic" demands close critical analysis, we must not balk at understanding him as an actor in his own day. This is so, indeed, because his own historiosophy was so thoroughgoing as to be almost pantheistically exacting. He was so minutely preoccupied with the details of historical change because "history causes truth to break forth from the smallest illusions of 'development' ".[56] In fact, at the end of his life, he underscored this point: "[It is] precisely in the noninterchangable sequence of epochs that the true mystery of the deity is unveiled."[57] And so, following this "inner logic" we must see him as a member of his moment, as an active agent in the "noninterchangable sequence of epochs". Walter Benjamin summoned just such a deep historicism in his call for a history of esoteric literature: "... as the deeply grounded composition as an individual who, from inner compulsion, portrays less a historical evolution than a constantly renewed, primal upsurge of esoteric poetry – written in such a way it would be one of those scholarly confessions that can be counted in every century."[58]

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awakening and the activation of the dimension of transcendence within mankind ... We may well say that the essence of the way to be followed in the dark age is summed up in the saying 'riding the tiger'." *The Yoga of Power. Tantra, Shakti and the Secret Way*, translated by Guido Stucco (Inner Traditions International, Rochester, Vermont, 1992) p. 189.

[55] "Whoever seeks to avoid betraying the bliss which tradition still promises in some of its images and possibilities buried beneath its ruins must abandon that tradition which turns possibilities and meanings into lies. Only that which inexorably denies tradition may once again retreive it." Adorno, "On Tradition", [1966] translated in *Telos* 74 (1992–1993) p. 82.

[56] I cite the now famous letter to Schocken, as provided in David Biale's *Gershom Scholem, Kabbala and Counterhistory* (Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press).

[57] Scholem was speaking here (*Origins of Kabbalah*, p. 474) of *Sefer Temunah*, but one may justifiably read this ostensible gloss as an historiosophic *cri de coeur*.

[58] "Surrealism", in *Reflections*, 184.

Appendix

Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst
Das Rettende auch.

"Where there is danger, there salvation grows too". This couplet from Hölderlin's "Patmos" operated as a touchstone byword in the present context.

"Patmos", for example, is cited by Scholem in a lengthy epigraph to his great essay, "Franz Rosenzweig and His Book *The Star of Redemption*", now translated in *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig* (ed.) Paul Mendes-Flohr (Brandeis University Press and the University Press of New England, Hanover and London, 1988) pp. 20–42, p. 20. Adorno and Scholem corresponded about the lost Walter Benjamin commentary on this poem: "His early study of Hölderlin, however, as far as I know an interpretation of Patmos which I never read but for which he himself expressed great esteem, was not among the manuscripts." (Letter of Theodor Adorno, 2.19.42, to Scholem, now found in Scholem's *Briefe I* (ed.) Itta Shedletzky (Verlag C.H. Beck, München, 1994) p. 436).

Others who evoked this aphorism, sometimes in an almost talismanic way, include Heidegger and Ernst Jünger. See Caputo's illuminating remarks on the centrality of this saying in the Jünger/Heidegger relationship and in the philosophy of Heidegger as such: "A myth of danger and greatness has clearly taken hold of Heidegger, a myth whose motto is: in the safe, danger grows. This is the first and Jüngerian form of the Hölderlinian formula which guided the later – and reverse – myth to which Heidegger had recourse from 1936 on: in the danger, the saving grows. The Hölderlinian formula is an exact reversal, a flip of the line he had learned from Jünger and which had dominated his thought from after the publication of *Being and Time* to *An Introduction to Metaphysics.*" (John D. Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger*, (Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1993) p. 55). For Heidegger's influential gloss on the couplet, see his "What are Poets For?" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter (Harper & Row, New York, 1971) p. 118.

Horkheimer and Adorno cite this saying in "Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment", orginally published in *Dialectic of Enlightenment.* A new, superior translation is found in Robert Hullot-Kentor's version, published in *New German Critique* 56 (1992) 109–141, at 112. Paul Celan, in his "Tenebrae" of 1957, unmistakably played on "Patmos". See the magisterial translation and commentary by John Felstiner, *Paul Celan, Poet, Survivor, Jew* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1995) pp. 101–102, and p. 306, nn. 36–38, for the critical literature on this poem.

Carl Jung cited this couplet near the end of his essay, "The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man", originally published in 1930, cited here from the revised version found in *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (Harcourt, Brace & World, New York, 1933) p. 220. Jung was, of course, termed the *Spiritus Rector* of the Eranos meetings.

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